

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 819

CS 503 523

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 TITLE Audience Perceptions of the Academy Awards
 Telecast.
 PUB DATE May 81
 NOTE 15p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
 International Communication Association (Minneapolis,
 MN, May 21-25, 1981).
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Attitudes: Audiences: *Media Research: *Programing
 (Broadcast): *Television Viewing
 IDENTIFIERS *Academy Awards: *Audience Response

ABSTRACT

Residents in a southern California city were surveyed by telephone about their attitudes toward the telecast of the motion picture "Academy Awards" presentations. Of the 141 respondents, 71 had not watched the telecast, 42 had watched some of the broadcast, and 28 had watched all of it. Less than one third of the survey questions were specifically dependent on respondents having watched the telecast. The results indicated that the Academy Awards telecast seemed to attract an audience more as a television program than as a film event, with heavier television viewers more likely than lighter viewers to watch the telecast. In contrast, frequent moviegoers were not significantly more likely to watch the telecast. The reason cited most often for watching the telecast was to find out who the winners were, with seeing the celebrities as the second reason. The younger respondents attended movies more frequently, while the older respondents were heavier television viewers. Respondents cited mass media more than word-of-mouth as influencing their own movie selection and as effective advertising for movies. The results also indicated that the proportion of respondents who preferred a one-hour telecast and believed that there were too many award categories was greater than the proportion of those who would be upset if the Awards were not televised. (HTH)

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AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF THE
ACADEMY AWARDS TELECAST

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A paper presented to the
International Communication Association,
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The awards ceremony of the National Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which is telecast each spring and popularly known as the "Oscars" show, is the most widely viewed annual media event originating from the United States. The American Broadcasting Company, which has been televising the ceremony since 1961, claims an audience in excess of 300 million persons in more than 50 countries. In recent years advertising rates have passed \$300,000 per minute and bring in a total of more than \$5 million to ABC for the Oscars show. The power of the American film and television industries combine to produce this lucrative expression of multinational culture. It is a cultural event of international and intercultural, as well as domestic, significance. Who watches the Academy Awards telecast, for what reasons, and with what meaning attached to it?

Context and Focus of This Study

This study attempts to provide a profile of typical Academy Award viewers and their perceptions of the telecast and its implications. This survey is one stage of a larger project attempting to explain the multi-faceted production, content, and effects of the telecast.

Despite the widespread popularity and dissemination of the annual Academy Awards telecast, virtually nothing of a scholarly nature has been published on the subject. When the small journal Exetasis published a special issue on the subject following the 1979 telecast, it was the first such focused effort to appear amid the volume of popular journalistic treatments of the subject in newspapers and magazines and on radio and television. Aware that a cultural event of such dominance will have numerous significant implications, a group of researchers are currently engaged in a multi-dimensional study of the Awards ceremony and telecast. Areas of investigation include: (1) the production of culture, explored through interviews with production personnel such as the director of the telecast, (2) content analysis, developed through a detailed analysis of videotapes of the ceremonies together with the Academy's second-by-second manuscript/transcript of the telecasts, (3) political economy, investigated by identifying the economic and institutional factors that limit and direct the possibilities of the show, (4) social responsibility, examined by comparing the

degree of cultural impact to the level of accepted moral and ethical accountability proportionate to such impact, and (5) survey research, employed to assess public perceptions of the telecast in light of all of the above.

Methodology and Sample

This paper reports the first stage of audience research in our Academy Awards project. The methodology for the audience survey followed standard procedures. A questionnaire was constructed and tested examining approximately 119 variables related to the telecast and the audience. A group of graduate students were recruited and trained to administer the survey by telephone. The experimental sample was randomly selected from among the population of San Diego County. In order to include the 27% of San Diegans with unlisted telephones, the telephone numbers were computer generated with prefixes proportional to population areas and suffixes randomly generated. From a master list of 2000 such phone numbers, 141 questionnaires were completed by the 16 telephone callers. All calls were completed between the Wednesday and Sunday immediately following the Academy Awards telecast on Tuesday, April 1, 1981. Except for an under-representation of Hispanics, the sample respondents represent a typical cross-section of San Diego and the United States in terms of sex, age, years in school, and similar demographics. (This survey in no way assesses perceptions from outside the United States, unfortunately.) Multiple statistical procedures were employed to explore interrelationships among the resulting data.

General First-Level Findings

Of the 141 survey respondents, 71 had not watched the telecast, 42 had watched some and 28 had watched all of it. Less than 1/3 of the survey questions were specifically dependent on having watched the telecast so the survey provides comparative data from all 141 respondents for the majority of questions, questions about their attitudes and behavior related to Academy Awards, television, and film.

The most highly rated reason for viewing cited by the 70 respondents who watched all or part of the Awards telecast was "to find out the winners" (4.5 mean score on a 5 point scale). Also important were "to see the celebrities" (3.5), "to see the dances and hear the nominated songs" (3.2), and "to see film clips" (2.9). Somewhat less important were "to be able to talk about it," "because nothing else was on," "to share time with others," and "for celebrity chitchat" (all at about 2.2 or slightly lower). These answers indicate that the high American valuation of competition is obvious. Further, the star system retains

its power, and in general, entertainment appears to outweigh social goals as motivation for viewing.

On a series of 17 opinion questions, the 141 respondents revealed some interesting variations. While 66% "enjoy watching" the show, only 34% actually "look forward" to it each year. While 49.6% think movies at a theatre are a good value, 54.6% admit to preferring to watch movies at home on television. A full 75% agree that "sound and picture quality at a theatre are better than TV can produce," but slightly more (81%) "would like to see more first-run movies on TV." The 3 to 3½ hour length of the program is a problem for many: about half (49.6%) would prefer "a one-hour program of awards for best film and best acting," and yet only 38% think "there are too many awards in unimportant categories." The same percentage of respondents (77%) agreed that "a movie's earnings are greatly increased by winning an Academy Award" and that "it is unfortunate when celebrities use the awards show to present their political views." On that last point, it may be interesting that twenty respondents (14%) disagreed and thirteen respondents (9%) had no opinion in judging as "unfortunate" the controversial statements of Vanessa Redgrave, Marlon Brando (by proxy), and others.

An unanticipated cynicism emerged when more than half the sample (54.6%) agreed with the statement, "The Academy Awards are nothing more than a public relations event for the film industry, in an effort to focus attention on films and increase moviegoing by the public." We assumed the strong phrasing, "nothing more than," would scare away most respondents but, in fact, only 27% disagreed with the statement. Asked "Are you more likely to see a certain movie because it has won an Academy Award?" 45% answered yes, and 34% were more likely to go if one was merely nominated. Only 3.5% felt winning had no effect on a film's success or an actor's career. Respondents offered that winning would help by publicity (33%), better roles (21%), increased income (16%), and popularity and recognition (15%). There can be no question that the audience perceived a promotional incentive beneath the Awards ceremony.

At the same time as they sense the pay-off of winning Academy Awards, comparatively few respondents could freely recall past winners. Only 21% could recall a Best Picture winner from the last five years. Only 25% could recall a Best Actor winner in the last five years and only 26% a Best Actress, revealing no apparent sexism in winner recall. Most also indicated that they learned little about stars and movie people by watching the show. Of the 70 respondents who viewed the show, only 10% responded that they learned "some" or "a lot" about them, 23% reported learning nothing, and two-thirds (67%) claimed they learned "not much" or "a little" about the stars and movie people by watching the

Table 2. Attitude and Opinion Profile:
Responses to Seventeen Statements

Statements	Percent Responding		
	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree
a. I look forward to the Academy Awards each year.	53.2	12.8	34.0
b. I talk about the nominations with friends before the awards are given.	64.5	2.8	32.6
c. I enjoy watching the Academy Awards show.	22.0	12.1	66.0
d. I usually have my personal favorites picked out before the awards show.	44.0	4.3	51.8
e. I enjoy the beauty and fashions displayed at the Academy Awards presentation.	29.8	12.8	57.4
f. I think the awards are an important part of the motion picture industry.	21.3	18.4	60.3
g. I think it is important to recognize a certain movie, actor, or actress as the winner.	35.5	17.0	47.5
h. I think movies at the theater are a good entertainment value.	34.8	15.6	49.6
i. I prefer to watch movies at home on the TV.	35.5	9.9	54.6
j. I would like to see more first-run movies on TV.	12.1	7.1	80.9
k. I think the sound and picture quality at a theater are better than a TV can produce.	13.5	11.3	75.2
l. The Academy Awards are nothing more than a public relations event for the film industry, in an effort to focus attention on films and increase moviegoing by the public.	27.0	18.4	54.6
m. I think there are too many awards in unimportant categories.	45.4	16.3	38.3
n. I would prefer to watch a one-hour program of awards for best film and best acting.	35.5	14.9	49.6
o. A movie's earnings are greatly increased by winning an Academy Award.	9.2	14.2	76.6
p. I feel that films with larger budgets are more likely to be nominated for an Academy Award (than lower budget films).	35.5	14.2	50.4
q. I feel it is unfortunate when celebrities use the awards show to present their political views.	14.2	9.2	76.6

Academy Awards.

Eleven films dominated the major award nomination categories. These films had been viewed by the following number of respondents: Ordinary People 43, Private Benjamin 40, Coal Miner's Daughter 27, Stuntman 26, Elephant Man 20, The Great Santini 17, Tess 16, Tribute 16, Raging Bull 10, Resurrection 5, Gloria 4. These films had been available for extremely different lengths of time in San Diego (as elsewhere). As a result, the numbers are not a measure of popularity but rather an indication of the general filmic frame of reference of respondents.

Qualified support for the Multiple-Step Flow theory of communications influence was found. Many respondents cited "word-of-mouth" as their source of information about a movie they choose to see and as the most effective advertising for a movie, but overall media sources were cited far more than interpersonal sources. Two questions related to this. One asked: "For the films which you go to see, how do you learn about them?" and the answer was open-ended. The other question asked: "What do you think is the most effective way of advertising a movie?" and it listed six options. The answers on these questions were as follows:

	How learn about movies	Most effective way of advertising
TV Ads	23	38
Word of Mouth	31	21
Newspaper or Magazine Ad	27	17
Newspaper or Magazine Review	4	5
Movie Preview	1	5
TV Review	1	5
None	10	4
No Answer	3	5
	100%	100%

Table 1: Film Choice by Media and Interpersonal Channels

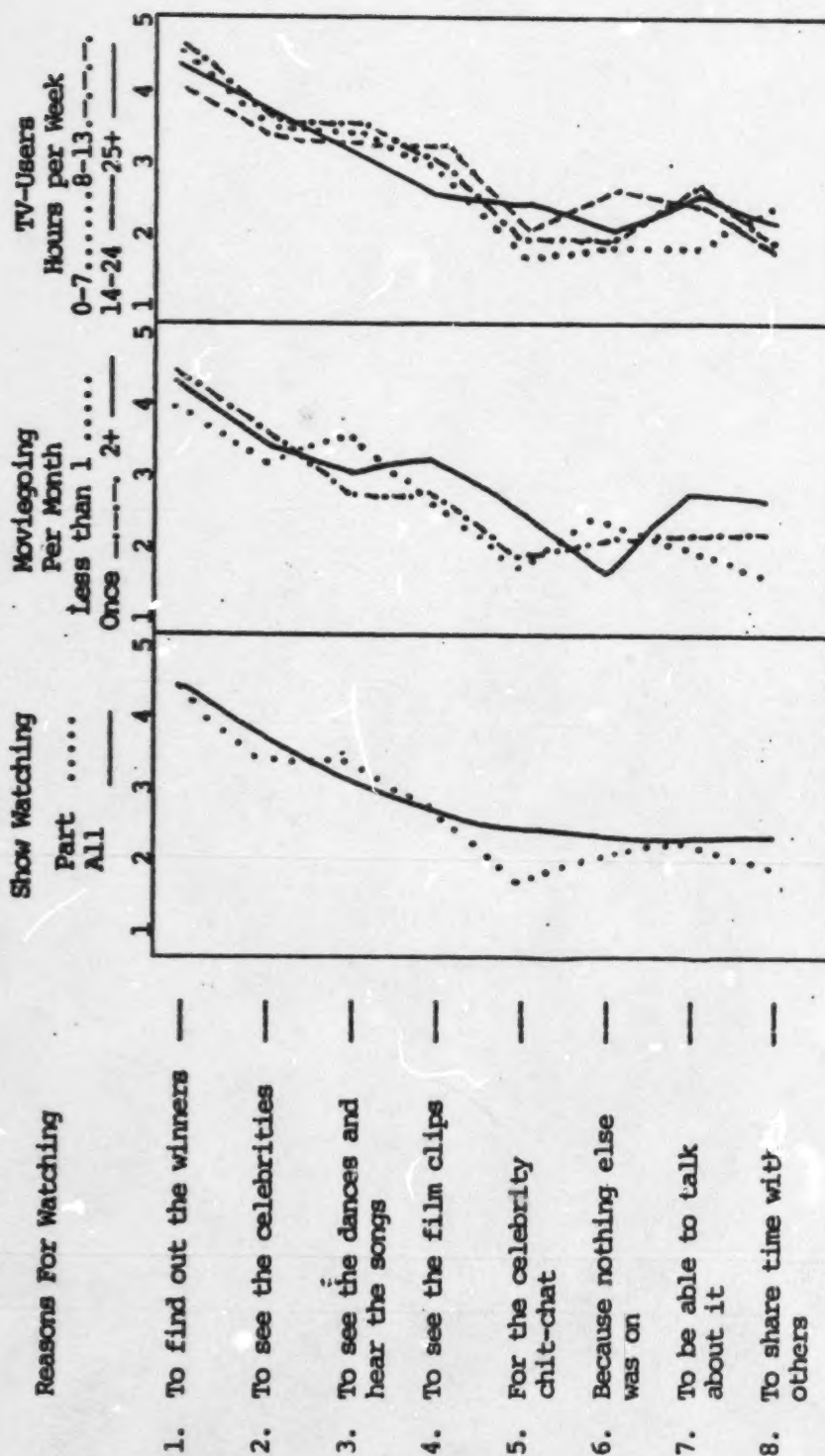
The survey asked two somewhat unusual questions in an attempt to assess whether respondents personally care about the Awards and telecast. One question asked their reaction if the Academy Awards were abolished. In response, 63% indicated indifference, 33% said they would be upset, and 4% said they would be happy or very happy. A milder question asked their reaction if the Awards were not televised. To that 82% were indifferent, 13% upset or very upset, and 4% happy or very happy. (2% did not answer these two questions.) The net impression is that a minority (about 1/7 of the respondents) care deeply about seeing the awards, the vast majority could live without the show, and a few personally resent the telecast and awards.

Groupings of Respondents by Media Usage

Variations by telecast viewing: all, part, or none. Of the survey respondents, 71 had watched none of this year's telecast, 42 had watched some of it, and 28 had watched all. Importantly, those who watched none this year had watched a mean of only 1.67 Academy Awards telecasts in the last five years. Those who watched some this year had a mean of 3.26 shows watched of the last five. And those who watched all of this year's had watched a mean of 4.07 of the last five Awards telecasts. These variations, significant at the .001 level, indicate that the three groups represent three distinct levels of viewer relationship toward the Academy Awards telecast. How do these three groupings correlate with with other responses on the questionnaire?

Across the three groups, there is no difference in movie attendance and only a weak difference in television watching in general, with "all" watchers (those who saw the entire Academy Awards telecast this year) tending to watch more television. "All" watchers were able to recall more of the past winners and tended to be older than non-watchers. The reasons for watching rated by the three groups tended to be very similar with the "all watchers tending to be slightly more tolerant of celebrity chitchat. Watchers of "all" or "some" of the show differed from non-watchers in certain attitudes. Watchers were more likely to look forward to the show, to enjoy watching it, and to pick out favorites in advance. "All" watchers were most likely to feel (50% agreed) there are too many awards in unimportant categories. More of those who watched "none" of the show agreed (39.4%) than disagreed (32.4%) there are too many unimportant awards, but only 29% of those who watched "some" agreed while 64% disagreed. In short, those who watch "all" or "none" are most bothered by the number of awards while the middle group which watches "some" is least bothered; apparently the

Table 4. Reasons For Watching Among Various Audience Subgroups



last group are their own editors making the show into what they wish it to be by selective viewing.

Variations by frequency of moviegoing versus television viewing. The Academy Awards telecast is a unique blending of two major entertainment industries, film and television. Is the show more attractive to heavy television viewers or frequent moviegoers? To answer this and related questions, respondents were reclassified by two schemes. First, they were classified according to frequency of moviegoing: those classified as "non-moviegoers" averaged fewer than .5 theatre movies per month ($n=43$), those classed as "occasional" moviegoers attended .5 to 1.9 movies per month ($n=59$), and those labeled "frequent" moviegoers averaged 2 or more (the maximum monthly average cited was 6) per month ($n=37$). Second, respondents were classified according to amount of television viewing: those who reported watching 0-7 hours per week ($n=37$) were labeled "very light" viewers, those who watched 8-13 ($n=33$) were labeled "light" viewers, watchers of 14-24 hours ($n=31$) were called "moderate", and those watching more than 25 hours per week ($n=42$) were labeled "heavy" viewers. The question then carried through the rest of the responses on the questionnaire was: Which of these two variations--by moviegoing or television viewing--better accounted for differences in attitudes and behavior related to the Academy Awards telecast?

In general, likelihood of viewing the Oscars telecast varies with television viewing but not moviegoing. Heavy and moderate television viewers watched more of the past five shows (mean = 3.2) than did very light (2.4) or light (1.9) viewers. ($p < .01$) In contrast, no significant differences in number of last five shows viewed emerged among non-moviegoers, occasional moviegoers, and frequent moviegoers. This seems to imply that the Awards telecast serves better the interests of ABC and the television industry than those of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the film industry. Television viewers are specifically attracted to the Awards show while moviegoers are not, thus limiting somewhat the programs potential for stimulating and directing movie theatre attendance.

While heavier moviegoers were not more likely to watch, they were more likely to recall winners from the past five years and, predictably, to have seen more of the eleven films nominated in 1981 in major categories. No significant differences occurred among heavier or lighter television viewers on these two questions.

Heavier moviegoers were more likely to have social uses for the Awards telecast. Both heavier moviegoing and heavier television viewing correlated slightly with higher ratings of "celebrity chitchat" in the telecast, while heavier moviegoers, as well as lighter television viewers, were least likely to have watched merely "because nothing else was on." Instead, the heavier the movie-

going the higher were the ratings for "to be able to talk about it" and "to share time with others" as reasons for watching the telecast. In addition, heavier moviegoers were more likely to agree that they "look forward to the show" ($p < .005$), and "have personal favorites picked out" ($p < .001$). Amount of television viewing, in contrast, did not vary significantly with any of these questions. Thus, even though heavier moviegoers are not more likely to watch, if they do watch they are more active and socially oriented as viewers.

The most decisive variation correlating with both television viewing and moviegoing is that of age of respondent. As is generally assumed, among adults television viewing increases with age and moviegoing decreases with age. In this survey, the mean age of "heavy" television viewers was 44 years, while the mean age of "very light" viewers was 31 years, the mean age of "frequent" moviegoers was 30 years, while the mean age of "non-moviegoers" was 46 years. (see Table 3. page 9)

Indices of Respondent Attitudes and Behavior: A Factor Analysis

Since the Academy Awards questionnaire contains more than 100 variables, application of factor analysis is useful to reduce many variables to a few underlying variables. In fact, 17 statements for agreement or disagreement and 8 reasons for watching the telecast were all constructed with analysis in mind. Different questions throughout the questionnaire dealt variously with opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. For analysis, variables have been distinguished into (A) those concerned with attitudes, opinions, and characteristics of the respondents and (B) those concerned with behavior in terms of media usage. Categories included those below.

<u>Attitudes/Characteristics</u>	<u>Behavior</u>
Statements about media	Watch this & last five shows
Effects of winning Academy awards	See/like to see nominated films
Reaction if abolished or not televised	Name previous award winners
Schooling	How many movies per month
Age	How much television per week
Sex	

Table 5: Survey Questions by Emphasis on Attitude or Behavior

Factor analysis with oblique rather than orthogonal rotation was performed in order to allow for inter-factor correlations.

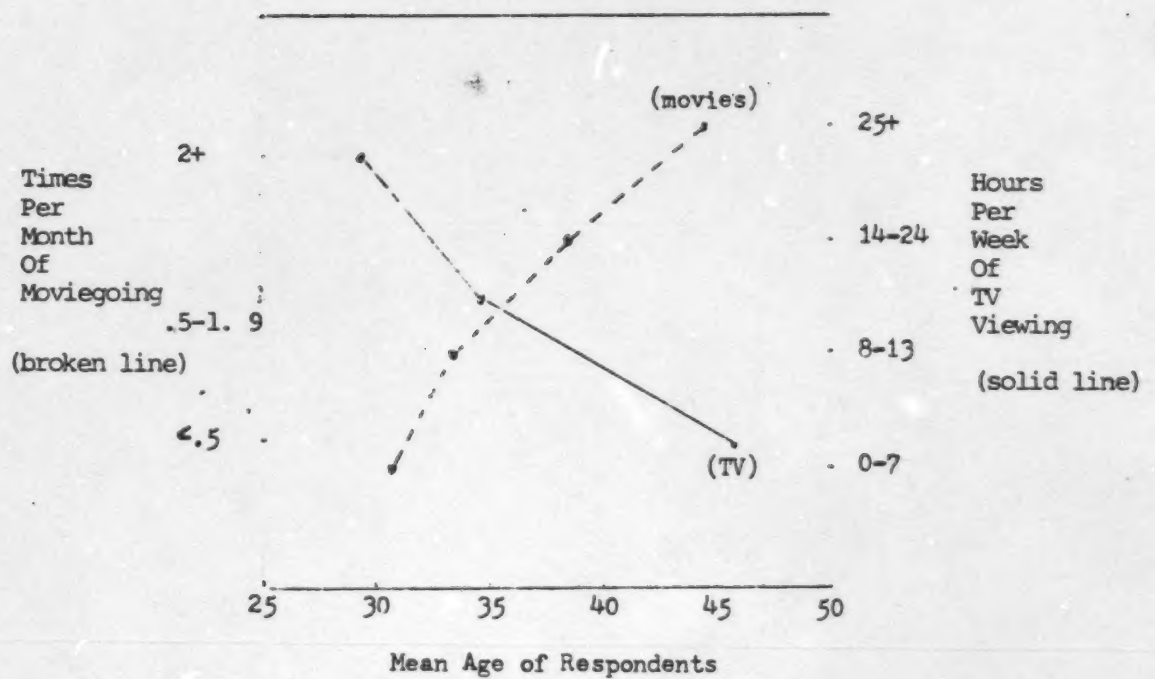


TABLE 3: VARIATIONS IN MOVIEGOING AND TV VIEWING BY AGE

Attitude constructs. From the attitude variables, a more complex set of four factors were produced which accounted for 45.2, 20.8, 19.6, and 14.4 per cent respectively of the total factor variance. These factors make it possible to identify a small cluster of questions which in each case most help in explaining differences among responses. These factors represent an attitude pattern and not groups of persons. However, we have given these patterns more personalized labels to make their shape more vivid. Of course, because these identify watershed questions, in effect, it is as likely that an individual will relate negatively to this factor construct as positively.

FACTOR I: "OSCAR FAN" INDEX

This factor accounted for a full 45.2% variance within the sample. The questions with their loadings which constitute this factor include:

I enjoy watching the telecast	.58
I oppose it being abolished or not telecast	.52
I look forward to the telecast	.53
I enjoy the beauty and fashion of it	.46

There was also a loading toward females on this factor.

FACTOR II: "HOMEBODY" INDEX

This factor accounted for 20.8% of the variance in attitudes.

The variables making it up were:

I prefer to watch movies at home on TV	.60
I do not talk about nominations beforehand	.51
I do not think theatre movies are a good value	.50
I do not pick out favorites beforehand	.47
I do not look forward to the telecast	.46

FACTOR III: "AWARD DEPENDENCY" INDEX

This set of factors accounted for 19.6% of variance. It included:

I am more likely to see movies which win Awards	.91
I am more likely to see movies which are nominated	.65
I talk about the Awards with friends	.38

FACTOR IV: "CYNICISM" INDEX

A fourth factor set emerged which revealed more negative attitudes toward the Awards and telecast. This factor accounted for 14.4% of variance. Its composition included:

Not upset if Awards were abolished	.63
Not upset if Awards not televised	.58

Winning increases movie/star earnings	.39
Telecast no more than promotional device	.23

Behavior Constructs. Factor analysis also identified two factor sets which accounted for 56.2% and 43.8% of variance on behavior questions.

FACTOR V: "OSCAR VIEWING" INDEX

I watched this year's Awards show	.85
I watched the last five shows	.64
I would like to see films which won	.56
I watch more TV	.36
Can name Award winners	.30

FACTOR VI: "OSCAR MOVIEGOING" INDEX

In contrast to the above behavior in Factor V which centered around viewing the Awards telecast, Factor VI identified behavior which centered around moviegoing as influenced by Oscar viewing.

Have you seen nominated films	.90
Go to movies more frequently	.42

Conclusions

Media type. The Academy Awards telecast seems to attract an audience more as a television program than as a film event. This is not surprising considering that the show is televised into homes rather than projected in theatres. The audience evidence for this conclusion is that heavier television viewers are more likely than lighter viewers to watch the telecast and to watch all of the telecast. In contrast, frequent moviegoers are not significantly more likely to view the telecast.

Motives. The value most highly rated as a reason for viewing the telecast was competition, namely, "to find out the winners." Other reasons highly rated confirmed the strength of the star system ("to see the celebrities") and the popularity of entertainment forms (songs and dances and the film clips). Viewing the telecast was engaged in not primarily for social purposes but rather for personal entertainment. Viewers motivated slightly more by active concerns and social aspects of viewing tended to be more frequent moviegoers.

Age. Younger respondents are more frequent moviegoers; older respondents are heavier television viewers.

Mass versus personal influences. Respondents cited mass media more than interpersonal channels both as influencing their own movie selection and as effective advertising vehicles for movies. This confirms the best research on the subject at the same time as it conflicts with minimalist allegations.

Reservations. Respondents exhibited critical awareness of the promotional aspects of the Awards and telecast. The proportion of those respondents who would prefer a one-hour telecast and believe there are too many awards is greater than the proportion of those who would be upset if the Awards were not televised or were abolished altogether.